

Global portal throws spotlight on open access movement

United Nations website tracks international initiatives that provide free access to research.

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The open access (OA) movement — which campaigns for free scholarly information via the Internet — has welcomed a website that aims to be the first port of call for checking the status of OA around the world.

The Global Open Access Portal, launched last month by UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) at its general conference, will provide policymakers with information on the global OA outlook and situations at country level. It will also point to examples of successful OA initiatives.

The portal is funded by Colombia, Denmark, Norway and the United States, and will help to fulfil UNESCO's mandate to provide universal access to knowledge, especially scientific research.

"It's good to see that UNESCO is joining, in concrete terms, the OA bandwagon," Raoul Kamadjeu, co-founder of the Pan African Medical Journal, told *SciDev.Net*. He said the website's focus on policymakers will encourage them to support the OA movement.

Deborah Kahn, publishing director of BioMed Central, an open access publisher based in the United Kingdom, said it is one of the first resources to give researchers an overview of the services and support available to them locally and internationally.

"The portal will allow researchers to develop and sustain their open access policies, which will lead to more effective research," she told *SciDev.Net*.

Kahn said that detailed, region-specific information could help researchers and institutions to set up new OA journals, institutional repositories and advocacy campaigns. She added that the portal will also act as a reference to show how others went about their OA developments and partnerships.



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Henk van Dam, a project officer for information and library services at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, said: "What I like about the portal is that it expresses support to the global open access movement by UNESCO and the sponsoring countries. It creates extra visibility for open access initiatives, especially from the South."

But there are concerns that the portal might not be used to its full potential. "The barrier will not be technical — computer or Internet connectivity — but motivational; why will I need to go there in the first place? Will they [researchers] even know it exists?" asked Kamadjeu.

Reggie Raju, director of information technology and communication at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, said exploring how to increase usage is important.

Keeping all developments accurate and up to date may be another challenge, said Kahn, and it will require a global effort as OA is a fast-moving field.

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